

NetMenu and a Prototype UMLS Information Sources Map

Perry L. Miller, M.D., Ph.D., Jeffrey I. Clyman, M.D., Sandra J. Frawley, Ph.D.
John A. Paton, Ph.D., Seth M. Powsner, M.D., Nancy Roderer, M.L.S.
Mark A. Shifman, M.D., Ph.D.

Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, CT 06510

The demonstration will show NetMenu and an Information Sources Map (ISM), two tools being developed to help the biomedical user find out about a range of network-based information sources, and to connect automatically to a chosen source. Both NetMenu and the ISM are operational at Yale, and available for use elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of network-based information resources are available to the clinicians, researchers, staff, and students of a medical center. We are developing user-friendly tools to help users learn about these resources and to connect automatically over the network. We will demonstrate a network menu (NetMenu) and a prototype Information Sources Map (ISM) developed as part of the Unified Medical Language System (UMLS) project of the National Library of Medicine. [1,2] Both NetMenu and the ISM are operational at Yale New Haven Medical Center, and are available for use by others.

NETMENU

NetMenu displays a graphical screen listing groups of services, e.g., library services, teaching programs, and clinical assistance programs. Clicking on a group name brings up a list of specific services. A user may then request information about a service or request an automatic connection. Services may run locally on the user's machine, elsewhere on campus, or anywhere on the Internet. NetMenu is written using XVT, a platform-independent interface-building package, and currently runs operationally on a Macintosh and a PC running Windows, and on a pilot basis on a PC in DOS character mode.

NetMenu can be readily customized. The groups of services displayed, and the specific services within each group, can be modified by changing a textual "configuration file." NetMenu and its access scripts are all mounted on network-based file servers to allow easy maintenance.

THE INFORMATION SOURCES MAP

Whereas NetMenu is designed to help access a relatively small set of information services that a group of users interacts with frequently, there is a large, rapidly growing, constantly changing group of information sources out on the network which a user may wish to access from time to time. The ISM is a network-based Unix server which actively helps the user find which of many information sources might be useful in solving a particular problem.

To use the ISM, the user types one or two biomedical terms describing a question. The user may also click on boxes to help indicate the nature of the question. The ISM then searches a list of information sources, each pre-coded to indicate the nature of its contents. A list of potentially relevant sources is presented to the user, who may then request information describing a source or an automatic network connection.

The ISM server currently contains about 90 sources, and is accessed by a PC/Windows or Macintosh client using the DynaComm communications package. One version of the ISM is customized to the information environment at Yale. Another version is "generic" and can be used anywhere.

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References

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